

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 001516

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/02/2013

TAGS: [KISL](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [XF](#) [XA](#) [XG](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: POLITICAL ISLAM: NIGERIA SNAPSHOT

REF: STATE 205815

Classified by Counselor James Maxstadt for reason 1.5 (c).

11. (C) Reftel questions appear to pertain primarily to countries with active Islamist political parties or NGOs, and Nigeria does not fit neatly into these cookie-cutter categories. Nigeria has no national parties or groups that pursue policies consistent with the definition of Political Islam put forth in reftel. Social problems exist in Nigeria to be sure, but even "religious issues" here are driven largely by political and economic considerations, and play on ethnic divisions.

12. (C) The only known group in Nigeria expressing overt hostility to political and religious pluralism is Sheikh Ibrahim Zak-Zaky's "Muslim Brotherhood." This allegedly Shi'a sect is a tiny minority even in its own part of the country and Zak-Zaky's influence has waned since his opposition to the Abacha regime in the nineties. Most of the meager funding he previously received from Iran has dried up. While his rhetoric has not cooled, he is unable to attract a wide following.

13. (C) Even smaller groups exist with varying degrees of influence in particular areas of the country. The Jamatul Nasiral Islam (JNI) and the Izala movement are the two most influential. Both strive to defend northern Nigeria's heritage against "secular" influences, but their primary concern is promoting the social and economic welfare of Nigeria's Muslims. Izala is the more conservative of the two, viewing the practice of Islam in Nigeria as tainted by the influence of the West African Sufis. While the JNI and Izala are not political movements, individual members are politically active in most of the 30 officially registered parties in Nigeria and throughout most of the 36 states in Nigeria.

14. (C) Following is response to the eight questions contained in reftel:

a) Not applicable. No successful (or unsuccessful) groups espousing Political Islam exist.

b) About half of the population of Nigeria could potentially be influenced by any Islamist group promoting social justice, economic improvement and democratic principles in Nigeria.

c) While influences from outside exist, Nigerian groups tend to pursue a domestic agenda and receive only limited funding from outside.

d) The practice of Shari'a in Nigeria is traditional but also a response to civil disorder. It is more about social justice than an Islamist agenda, at least among Nigerians. Shari'a is not widely viewed as "evolutionary" in Nigeria, but neither does its application depend on the immutable seventh-century interpretation. Instead, it is supported by the practice introduced in Nigeria in about the tenth century and adapted to local conditions. It is based on the Maliki school of jurisprudence, but with heavy influence by the Sufi tariqas which abound throughout West Africa.

e) No modernizer has emerged to take the place of the late Sheikh Gumi from Bauchi, although several respected Sheikhs are locally important.

f) n/a

g) The JNI and Izala can and do cooperate across the political spectrum, within the bounds outlined above in Para 13.

h) The negative perception of our policies is dampened by a widespread respect for America and Americans. Nigerian intellectuals almost universally resent at least some USG policies, notably concerning the Middle East, but private or public individual Americans are generally not blamed. There is also a vast pool of pro-American sentiment on other policy issues. And many Nigerians have enduring misconceptions about the U.S., as in not believing there are American Muslim who are not immigrants. Any claims to the contrary of such popular misconceptions are generally discounted.

ROBERTS